



Task Force Phoenix prepares for a Changing of the Guard

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KABUL, Afghanistan – Leaders of the Florida Army National Guard's 53rd Infantry Brigade recently spent some time in Afghanistan to get a first-hand look at what their unit will be doing for the next year. The entire 53rd Infantry will return in a little more than a month to assume duties as Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix IV, replacing the 76th Infantry Brigade from the Indiana Army National Guard. A transfer of authority ceremony is scheduled for July 31.

The 53rd Infantry's visit was part of a scheduled pre-deployment site survey designed to provide the unit's leadership with a comprehensive overview of their future mission. Spending almost two weeks at Camp Phoenix and surrounding training sites with their staff counterparts, the Florida Soldiers were able to gain a clear understanding of what their responsibilities will entail when they return to accept the guidon.

The Indiana Guardsmen of Task Force Phoenix III have made great efforts to ensure the upcoming transition is conducted efficiently.

"We're talking continuously with their senior leadership, and we've provided copies of all our standard operating procedures to help them integrate smoothly into the mission," said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Richard Moorhead, commander of Task Force Phoenix.

Florida Army National Guard Col. Butch Redding, the 53rd's deputy brigade commander, said the visit was essential to his unit's preparation.

"The recon allowed us to get 'on

the ground' and actually see how the Phoenix mission works. Briefings, plans and overviews are extremely helpful, but nothing replaces actually being there to experience the mission first-hand," he said.

Task Force Phoenix, a subordinate unit of the Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan, is charged with conducting the training of the Afghan National Army. Since its arrival in Afghanistan last August, the 76th Infantry Brigade has succeeded in this role, building the ANA from virtually nothing into an extremely professional and disciplined force.

The 76th Infantry has achieved many significant accomplishments throughout the past year. Under their stewardship, ANA basic training at the Kabul Military Training Center has increased to support the simultaneous training of five kandaks (battalions) and development at KMTC has greatly expanded. Additionally, the task force also provided critical training and support to establish the new National Military Academy of Afghanistan.

The task force's training responsibilities, however, do not end when ANA kandaks graduate from basic training. Senior company grade officers and noncommissioned officers serving as embedded trainers remain with the kandaks and continue to mentor the Afghan leadership as the units deploy to the field to conduct combat operations. In this role, Task Force Phoenix Soldiers have been actively involved with the ANA in combat missions against anti-coalition forces.

Whether calling for fire support or participating directly in the destruction or capture of Taliban and al Qaeda



forces, the 76th Infantry has helped to take the fight in the war against terrorism from the ANA bases to the outlying battlefields of Afghanistan.

The 53rd Infantry can expect to do the same. Redding is certain his unit is ready.

As the 53rd Infantry Brigade prepared to return to Florida, Moorhead offered them a few parting words of advice. "We have to be respectful of the fact that it is their army. Remember that this is Afghanistan, and it's their country. It is better to let them do it imperfectly than to do it perfectly yourself, for it is their country...and your time is short," he said, paraphrasing the words of T. E. Lawrence, better known as the legendary "Lawrence of Arabia."

With the solid foundation provided by Indiana's 76th Infantry Brigade, the 53rd Infantry Brigade is certain to be successful when they accept the task force mission at the end of July. With a first-hand perspective and the valuable experiences gained from their site survey to compliment the mission training they have been conducting back in the States, the Soldiers from Florida will be well-prepared to assume their new mission—training a professional army that is capable of providing security and stability for the people of Afghanistan.

